AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (currently amended) A method of processing mail items to be returned to sender by scanning and storing the images of the mail item surfaces provided with ~~the~~ distribution data and identifying at least the regions containing the sender address, characterized in that similarities are identified for the image regions containing the sender addresses, that of the mail items showing a predetermined degree of similarity for the images of ~~the~~ address regions, only one mail item is video-coded while ~~the~~ remaining mail items are assigned to ~~the~~ an identified sender.

2. (previously presented) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the similarities of the sender address images are determined with the Mellin-Fourier-Autocorrelation.

3. (currently amended) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that the regions containing ~~the~~ sender data of mail items from large-volume customers are video-coded prior to processing the mail items and are stored in a return data file, together with ~~the~~ characteristics determined for ~~the~~ associated images and used for the similarity analysis, which return data file is updated during the processing of mail items to be returned to sender.

4. (currently amended) A method according to claim 1, characterized in that each mail item to be returned to sender, for which the sender address cannot be read clearly automatically, is checked to determine whether ~~the~~ image characteristics used for the similarity analysis of the region containing ~~the~~ sender data exhibit the predetermined degree of similarity with ~~the correspondingly~~ stored image characteristics of the region containing the sender data of a mail item with previously video-coded sender address and that if this degree of similarity exists, the mail item is assigned to the previously video-coded sender address and that if

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the predetermined degree of similarity does not exist, the mail item is then video-coded and the characteristics of the image of the region with the sender data are stored together with the result of the video-coding.

5. (currently amended) A method according to claim 1, for which the mail items are provided with (ID) flags and the images of the mail items are stored under the associated ID flags, characterized in that ~~the~~ characteristics of the sender data region that are used for the similarity analysis are stored together with the result of the video-coding under the respective ID flags.

6. (currently amended) A system for processing mail items to be returned to sender, comprising a device for generating and storing mail item images, an OCR reader for the automatic evaluation of the identification of the regions of interest, ~~such as~~including sender address, recipient address, return to sender instructions or return stamp, with the aid of the stored images, and for running a result check in a name/address data bank and a return data file, further comprising a device for video-coding the images or the regions of interest on mail items with result checks, said device having at least one video-coding station, one image controller for controlling the data flow between the OCR reader and the device for video-coding, which supplies the corresponding mail item images or only the respective sender address regions to the video-coding device if ~~the~~ sender addresses cannot be read clearly, and which feeds the video-coding results to the OCR reader so that they can be stored together with the associated image, characterized in that the OCR reader is provided with a device for determining similarities between images, which device contains images of the sender addresses on the identified mail items that are to be returned to sender, that when detecting a fixed degree of similarity between stored images characteristics of the region with sender data of ~~one of the~~ previously video-coded mail items and ~~the~~ image characteristics of a new mail item, the new mail item is assigned to the coding results of the previously video-coded mail item and, if the predetermined degree of similarity is not reached, the respective image of the sender address of the new mail item is supplied via the image controller to the device for video-coding and the coding result is transferred to the OCR reader for storage together with the image characteristics of the sender address image, which are used for the similarity analysis.

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